

Address to High School Graduates

West Springfield High School Class of 2010

by Michael Rudolph
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Thank you for allowing me to share a few of my thoughts at this very special and happy occasion. When I was asked if I would speak I knew, right away, what I wanted to say to you, and so I will get right to it.

In June of 1957 – 53 years ago – I sat amidst my graduating class just as you are doing here this evening. My thoughts were of college and of my professional future, and I was blissfully unaware that I was already moving along a path that would eventually take me away from believing in God, and that would dramatically affect my values and my consequent future conduct.

My early religious upbringing was influenced by my Orthodox Jewish grandparents, and I received *Bar Mitzvah* at age 13 in a local Orthodox synagogue. My mother was not religiously observant, but she deeply believed in God, and it was mainly through her that I acquired my own early belief in God. But by the time I sat where you are sitting, I was no longer attending synagogue, and God was already not part of my conscious thoughts as I looked forward to college and to studying science, mathematics, and everything else technical that I could get my hands on. What I did not realize was that I was approaching a point of major decision – a fork in the road of my life where one branch would lead me to return to God and godly values, and where the other branch would lead me in the opposite direction. I took the wrong road.

I didn't see it coming. There was no one crucial moment when I chose against God. What happened was that, during my early college years, I became enamored of intellectual pursuits and especially the scientific method of determining what is true and what is not. Ever so subtly, I bought into the notion that if a thing could not be seen, could not be felt, could not be tasted, could not be smelled, or could not be measured with a scientific instrument, then it didn't exist – and if anyone thought it did, then they – not I – were deceived. This rationalistic view of the world that crept up on me was strengthened by professors who promoted humanistic philosophies and, as I considered myself way smarter than those who, in their weakness and insecurity, needed to believe in the fairytale of there being a God, I was soon calling myself an atheist. In telling you this, I am not faulting higher education, college professors, or intellectual pursuits. I am faulting myself for not being sufficiently discerning; it was I who allowed myself to be led astray.

I remained an atheist through my college years, through several years of graduate school, through law school (by then I had changed my professional direction), and well into my law practice. Then, one day, for no reason that I deserved, God sent a Christian believer to speak to me about God and Jesus. I figured that he was one of those weak ones who needed God as a crutch, so I was polite and let him have his say. After all, if he was so needy and limited in his understanding, why should I, the epitome of enlightened intelligence, pull the rug out from under him?

What happened then can only be explained as a miracle of God. As the man was speaking, I became cloaked by a powerful presence that I now know was the *Ruach HaKodesh* – the Holy Spirit of God. It captured my attention to the degree that I stopped listening to the man and turned my attention to what was happening to me. I can only describe it as a tactile force field, and this atheist instantly knew that God was real and present, and that He had sent this man to tell me the truth. It took God a week and a second powerful visitation to convince me that Jesus (whom I now know by His Hebrew name Yeshua) is, in fact, *Mashiach* – that is, the savior who is prophesied in the Old Testament, and described in detail in the New.

This all happened in 1976 when I was 37 years old, so I had spent the last eighteen years ignorantly denying the existence of God (and by extension the Messiah), and all the while believing myself to be ever so smart. And all this because I allowed myself to be wrongly influenced by worldly educators during my college years.

I am telling you this, members of the West Springfield High School class of 2010, in the hope that you will remember what happened to me, and will avoid making the same mistake. Many of you will be going to college and some of you may be entering the work force. In either case, you are now approaching that same fork in the road as I did, where secular worldly influences, masquerading as enlightened thought, will try to derail your faith. I am here to tell you that you will have the power to stand against these influences if you derive your knowledge of what is true primarily from the Word of God (the Scriptures), and only secondarily from other sources. In this way, you can take from the world what is good, and true, and godly, and reject that which is not.

My prayer for you today is that, in the years to come, you will walk with God, and that He will say of you: “Well done good and faithful servant.” Thank you.